

Event: Ordering Olympic coins

Time: 216 days

By Roger Boye

If you procrastinate, be forewarned: You've got just 216 days to order your Olympic coins from Uncle Sam.

The U.S. Mint says it will quit making the coins on Dec. 31 and will refuse to accept orders after next Jan. 18. Any remaining coins or dies will be demolished, according to reports in the hobby press.

Also, in yet another attempt to boost sales, government staffers say they will produce new mint-mark varieties of the \$10 coin containing .48 ounce of gold. Officials had indicated that the coin would bear just a "W" mint mark for the West Point [N.Y.] Bullion Depository. But now they also will make gold pieces with a "P," "D" or "S," the traditional mint marks.

The U.S. Mint is issuing just two types of silver dollars and one gold coin to commemorate the Los Angeles Olympics. But a collector would have to pay about \$2,000 to assemble a 13-coin complete set that includes all mint mark varieties in proof and uncirculated condition.

Fortunately, individual items are much less expensive, with prices ranging from \$28 for an uncirculated silver dollar [containing .77 ounce of silver] to \$352 for a proof gold coin. For more information or to order, write to the U.S. Mint, Olympic Coin Program, P.O. Box 6766, San Francisco, Calif. 94101.

● The last American coins from the great collection of Chicago beer baron Virgil M. Brand go on the auction block Monday and Tuesday in New York City.

The nearly 700-piece accumulation includes several exceedingly rare gold coins made by private companies in California during the gold rush of the mid-1800s. Another item—a set of six Indian peace medals struck when George Washington was president—ranks among the greatest of all numismatic treasures, according to Bowers and Merena Inc., which is conducting the sale.

By the time of his death in 1926, Brand owned 350,000 rare coins, the largest collection ever assembled by an individual. He kept the hoard inside his brewery located in what is now Brand Park along the 3200 block of North Elston Avenue.

● Just 5 percent of the coins examined in recent weeks by experts at the American Numismatic Association's Certification Service have been altered or counterfeited, continuing a decline from the 25 percent fraud level of 1979 and 1980.

The drop indicates a "cleaner" marketplace, brought on in part by publicity about deceptive coins, say ANA personnel who analyze thousands of pieces every month. In short, dealers and collectors are more cautious, making times tougher for con artists.